DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 188 236 CS 205 665

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TITLE The Politics of Testing.
PUB DATE Mar 80
NOTE 27p.: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (31st, Washington, DC, March 13-15, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement: *Accountability: Educational Policy: Elementary Secondary Education: Higher Education: *Literacy: Literacy Education: School Role: Test Bias: *Test Construction: Testing: *Testing Problems: Writing Instruction

ABSTRACT

Since literacy tests determine instruction, they should be designed to match well-defined instructional goals. They should be evaluated and implemented by those who teach literacy in consultation with other interested parties and should function to improve teaching as well as to evaluate students. Writing abilities should be measured directly or through those abilities that have been demonstrated to correlate with particular writing abilities. Types of literacy abilities to be tested should be defined and made explicit to students, graders, and instructors before testing and if possible before instruction. Colleges and universities must help students develop literacy abilities for work and for other social roles: and tests should reflect this obligation. The basic issue is not literacy versus illiteracy but what kind of literacy is being sought. Tests should reflect goals that are defined as people decide what types of literacy they want and need, rather than expressing the interests of employers in the existing job structure. (DF)

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THE POLITICS OF TESTING

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This is an expanded version of a paper read on Friday, 14 March, at the Conference on College Composition and Communication in Washington, D.C.

Comments and criticism will be most welcome.

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Conclusions:

1. Tests substantively constrain instruction. They should, therefore, be designed to match well-defined instructional goals.

2. Literacy tests should be evaluated, chosen or designed, and implemented by those who teach literacy (in consultation with other people concerned).

3. Literacy tests should be integrated into instructional programs. They should evaluate students and direct them to appropriate learning resources. They should function to improve teaching as well as to evaluate students.

4. Writing abilities should be measured directly (e.g., by evaluating a sample of the particular type of writing) or by measuring some ability which has been unequivocably demonstrated to correlate with the particular writing abilities.

5. The type or types of literacy abilities to be tested should be defined at the outset. Criteria should be made explicit for students, graders and instructors before testing and (if possible) before the instructional unit begins.

6. Although the educational system should not be blamed for the failures of the economic system, colleges and universities have an obligation to help students develop the literacy abilities they will need in their work.

7. Colleges and universities also have an obligation to help students develop the abilities they will need in their other social roles and to become "rounded" people. Tests should reflect this obligation.

8. Any contradiction between the vocational and humanistic functions of higher education needs to be resolved, and literacy testing should reflect this resolution.

9. The testing movement reflects the democratic desire of North American people to decide the ultimate goals of the educational system and to have that system operate in the interests of the majority. On another level, however, the testing movement functions to constrain the educational system toward producing the sorts of workers who would match the existing job-structure (i.e., it operates in the special interests of employers).

10. The basic issue is not <u>literacy vs. illiteracy</u> but <u>what kind of literacy?</u> People should be helped to understand that--i.e., to understand language processes and literacy--so they can effectively exercise their democratic rights. Tests should reflect goals which are defined as people decide what types of literacy they want and need.

from "The Politics of Testing"
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The Politics of Testing

In one sense, college-level literacy testing is an attempt to answer two straightforward questions: to what extent do entering students have the reading and writing abilities they need to do college work effectively? to what extent do graduating students have the reading and writing abilities they will need to function in their jobs and as citizens, consumers and well-rounded human beings in today's and tomorrow's societies?

Ultimately, it makes no sense to discuss tests in and of themselves. Logically, tests are subordinate to educational goals: to properly evaluate a test, one must first define one's goals and second ask to what extent the test measures progress toward those goals. (This latter question, as shall be demonstrated below, is much more critical and complex than is ordinarily assumed.)

Our recent experience has often been contrary to this logic. We have experienced testing in command, testing as "the enforcer" for a back-to-the-basics movement. Too often, instead of deciding what is important and testing that, we have rediscovered the tautology that whatever is tested is important, that 'English'is defined operationally as 'whatever is on the English test.' One of the basic political functions of tests is to constrain instructors towards teaching--and students towards learning--whatever is being tested.

In a society where most people at least consider entering college,[1] entrance and placement tests go a long way towards

defining the core of the high school curriculum (often without input from high school teachers). By underlining certain inabilities of entering students, they go a long way towards defining college courses and programs. Similarly, in a society where most people come to college primarily to qualify for certain types of jobs, questions about what abilities students need are, to some significant degree, ultimately answered by the major employers whose hiring criteria graduating students must meet. Insofar as educational institutions set up exit examinations (e.g., junior-level minimal competency tests), this constraint on our decisions about what to teach and on students' decisions about what to learn becomes explicit.

All of which is merely to indicate that in a complex social system even straightforward questions cannot be answered in isolation. College-level literacy testing functions in educational and socio-economic contexts and has implications for the entire educational system. And that is as it should be. In a basic sense, the underlying question is one of democracy: do the people (dēmos) rule (kratos)? is the North American educational system giving the people what they want? After all due allowances are made for the role of specialized expertise, in a democracy people have a right to decide on the ultimate goals of their educational system. And literacy testing is one important way for them to evaluate and control that system.

In the area of literacy, it is clear what people want (although it is also clear that their choices are constrained by "economic realities"). First, they want the reading and writing abilities

In composition teaching, the decade preceding back-to-the-basics was characterized by a growing trend toward "creative" self-expression as the predominant genre of student-writing and toward the teaching of rhetorical invention (especially those relatively unstructured techniques, such as freewriting, often associated with the unfortunate term, "pre-writing"). The ignorant belief that writing is an unteachable art--that composition instructors might as well confine themselves to discussing ideas, on the one hand, and the proprieties of usage, on the other--began to die. The false dichotomy between thinking and writing (i.e., the mistaken notion that people first think and only afterwards find words to "express" those thoughts, that language is merely a dress thought puts on) was dissolved in many quarters. Many students learned to enjoy, rather than fear, writing and to use writing to discover and understand their ideas, feelings and beliefs. At the same time, a growing understanding of language led to the widening realization that Standard English is in no scientific or intrinsic sense superior to the other dialects of English. These were the major virtues of the dominant trend in teaching composition, 1966-1975.

The back-to-the-basics and testing movements came into being in their present forms in part because the trend had its inadequacies as well. Too many of its followers never took students beyond the joys of "creativity," never taught them how to structure their writings to meet the needs and expectations of readers or how to do analytic as well as self-expressive

necessary to obtain and retain "good" jobs. Thereafter, they want the abilities they need to function comfortably and effectively in their other social roles (e.g., citizen, consumer) and as fulfilled human beings. It is clear that this is the order of priority: for the public, the economic goal is primary; the social and cultural goals (however interrelated) are secondary.[2]

Those who impose <u>institutionalized</u> testing on us (or convince us to impose it on ourselves)--thereby reducing (for good or ill) instructors' freedom to do their own evaluation and control the courses they teach--have been able to do so because people have been dissatisfied with what they have been getting from their schools, colleges and universities. The back-to-the-basics movement, as its name implies, has been largely a <u>counter</u>-revolt against an educational revolution of the late-1960s/early-1970s (a period which most people, significantly, insist on calling "the sixties," even though it did not end politically until about 1974 and ran, in composition-teaching, from about 1966 to 1975). Beneath this counter-revolt, however--as beneath previous literacy "crises"[3]--has been another, more basic phenomenon: an accelerating change in the structure of "white collar" work. The meaning of this change is that, to do their jobs, most people need <u>types</u> of reading and writing abilities quite distinct from those their parents needed. To understand what the testing movement is enforcing, we must look both at our own history and at socio-economic contexts. Then we must look at how tests are devised, what they actually test, and how they are implemented and used.

writing. Student-writing too often remained subjective self-expression rather than becoming communication. Too many students did not learn how to do the types of writing which are required in universities, nor the types which "make the world go round." For self-expressive writing, the pluralistic liberal notion that all dialects are equal was adequate; as long as they were involved primarily in self-discovery and expression, students did not need to be reminded that the important business of North America is conducted in Standard English. And, since self-expression cannot be evaluated objectively--as, at least in principle, communication can be--the emphasis on motivation and "positive feedback" contributed to "grade inflation."

These inadequacies did not interfere with the achievement of a certain <u>type</u> of literacy. Many students did learn to do good self-expressive writing. If students who receive this type of instruction were tested on how well they do the type of writing they have been taught, this pedagogy would often prove to have been remarkably successful. And, as the Story Workshop technique continues to demonstrate in the ghettos of Chicago, for example, this can be a very useful and liberating type of writing; it can help people discover their identities, individually and sometimes even as social groups.

But the current tests do not attempt to measure this type of literacy. What they measure--or at least claim and try to measure--is the type of literacy people need to obtain and do their jobs. And it certainly must be admitted that one of the social obligations of the educational system is to develop in

students those abilities required by the existing job-structure. Too often the debate over the so-called "literacy crisis" has turned round the question of whether North Americans are less literate now than they were in the past. The question that matters is whether North Americans are presently literate enough and literate in the right ways to function effectively in today's and tomorrow's societies.

Knowing whether North Americans are less literate now than in the past is useful only for assigning blame. And it is worth noting, at least in passing, that the educational system is being made a scapegoat for the failures of the economic system. Although the exceptional individual can occasionally "create" a job, and although those individuals whose abilities best match employers' needs are certainly likely to be the one's hired, one need only contrast the number of unemployed people with the number of vacant positions to realize that the unemployment problem is primarily economic. And the large numbers of underemployed people negate the argument that a better-educated workforce would be more productive and thereby create significantly more jobs--productivity seems to have much more do to with capital investment and motivation than with college education.

In other words, this is another case of "blaming the victim." Just as a person who has been raped may be blamed (e.g., for wearing attractive clothing), so the unemployed may be blamed for their own unemployment, may be told that if they were just better educated, they would have jobs. They then

blame the educational system, although this blame is only in a very secondary sense justified. Unfortunately, under present conditions, unemployment cannot be significantly reduced by improving education. The same is even more true for underemployment.

Still, students want to know if the colleges and universities are giving them the abilities they need to get whatever high-paying, professional jobs are available. Business wants to know if the educational "subsystem" is producing workers who are educated, trained and socialized to fit into the structure of production (and if it is doing so as "cost-effectively" as possible). By the mid-seventies, it was clear that the answers to these questions were negative--and that is the economic basis for the "literacy crisis" and the back-to-the-basics and testing movements. But the negative answers to these questions have as much, if not more, to do with the changing nature of "white collar" work as with curricular and pedagogical changes.

A steadily increasing percentage of North Americans has been attending college. Vocationally, that makes sense only if one assumes that more and more professional jobs have been becoming available. The people have been coming to college in large part because, relative to total population, blue collar jobs and small business opportunities have been decreasing. And a widely-shared assumption (sometimes called the "human capital" theory) asserts that as societies grow increasingly technological they will need increasingly skilled and educated workers.

Certainly it is true that, as an ever-larger percentage of the work-force is employed at "information-processing," "sales," and "service," more and more workers wear white collars, and more and more jobs require college degrees. Nonetheless, at least for our economic system, the "human capital" theory is essentially false. Since World War II, North American societies have grown increasingly technological and computer-based, but the bulk of "white collar" jobs have grown simpler and less professional. To understand which types of literacy abilities college graduates need to do their jobs, we should understand how this has happened.

Especially in the lower-status professions (e.g., nursing, accounting, school-teaching, lower management), where an ever-larger number of college graduates end up, <u>total work processes</u> may grow more complex, but <u>individual jobs</u> grow simpler.[4] The division of labor is increasingly hierarchical, and--under the aegis of "de-centralization"--<u>basic</u> decisions are increasingly centralized. This means that the individual worker needs a type of literacy distinct from the type we have traditionally associated with professionalism (and with a liberal education).

The testing movement itself, as it presently exists, is too often a case in point. Even at the college level, instructors often do not--either individually or collectively--set the educational goals for the courses they teach. The basic decisions about <u>what</u> to teach have been centralized and are enforced by tests. Even if instructors resist, students know that what will be on the test is what is "really" important.

And instructors, who are increasingly part-time or "temporary" rather than tenure-track or tenured, are not likely to resist much. They are, at any event, still allowed the autonomy of making implementation decisions about how to achieve the hierarchically mandated goals.

Even professors are losing some of the autonomy which defines professionalism. Although an ever-larger percentage have doctorates, relatively fewer are primarily scholars who go into the classrooms to profess. For better and for worse, most are primarily college teachers--and increasingly overworked and de-professionalized, though they are allowed to retain some of the signifiers of professorial status (especially those which do not cost money).

This essential trend, which separates basic conceptualization and goal-setting from implementation, is observable in virtually all the professions. It is especially clear in the lower-status professions and the lower levels of all professions. It increasingly defines the type of literacy abilities our students will need to do their jobs.

Precisely because conception and implementation are being separated within mental work (just as mental work was previously separated from manual work when "scientific management" destructed most of the crafts and replaced them with "skills"),[5] the basic decision-makers are often very far removed from the point of production. Only if they have subordinates who can write accurate reports will these decision-makers have the information they need to make correct and effective decisions.

They also need subordinates who can read accurately and make implementation decisions within the bounds set by written instructions and guidelines.

What this increasingly hierarchical division of labor requires is many workers who can read for information, follow instructions and (perhaps) write occasional short reports clearly and accurately; some workers with specialized reading, writing and thinking abilities to write longer reports and handle the "de-centralized" implementation decisions (which require the ability to make low-level inferences correctly); and a few real professionals with genuinely critical reading, writing and thinking abilities to serve in the centralized managerial elite. The testing movement, whatever else it may do, will assure that even the lower-status colleges develop in their students the abilities required of lower-status "white collar" workers (who, despite their white collars, increasingly resemble assembly-line workers).

It is easy to see that the type of literacy required by this hierarchical "professional" job-structure would not be produced by the liberal composition pedagogies of "the sixties," which were becoming increasingly widespread in 1969-75. Except at the higher levels, it is a specialist's literacy, not the type traditionally associated with a liberal education. It need not include even the type of critical reading and analytical/persuasive writing abilities one needs to function effectively as consumer and citizen in a linguistically-sophisticated, media-dominated environment, let alone the type of literacy we associate with a well-developed, fulfilled and "rounded" person.

Nonetheless, it is economically "basic." College instructors who do not help their students develop this type of literacy may, in at least one sense, be charged with irresponsibility. But college instructors who do nothing more than that may be charged with irresponsibility in at least one other sense. For what we have here, in a particularly intense form, is the old contradiction between humanism and hierarchical specialization. It is a contradiction which can be resolved.

Humanism, too, demands a particular type of literacy. Certain reading and writing abilities are essential to humanistic education because they lead to genuinely basic understandings. The writing process, especially, is a knowing-process; it forces writers to organize their knowledge, to interrelate information, and to get the general and the particular into meaningful relationship. There is a place here for "self-expressive" writing (witness Montaigne's Essays) and for report-writing (albeit a subordinate place[6]). There must also be development of critical analytic/persuasive writing abilities. In other words, the writing process must be a critical process if we are talking about education and not merely about "professional" training.

As things now stand, most junior college and many university students will get no further than the ability to write more-or-less "clear and correct" sentences, coherent topic-sentence-first paragraphs, simple five-paragraph essays which follow a standardized formula, and accurate short reports. As it is presently taking shape, that is what the testing movement will give us. In a sense, it will be an advance over

what some students have not been learning, but it will be a peculiar type of advance.

Many students will receive college and university degrees, but not the quality of literacy those degrees signify. This will be especially true for "non-traditional" students from social groups which began to attend university in significant numbers in the 1960s. To put it bluntly, these students will be (and already are being) lied to and cheated. They will receive degrees which say that they are educated when they will actually be just trained. They will end up in "professional" job categories that have been de-professionalized. The result will be alienation and anti-intellectualism as these graduates come to realize that their "educations" have neither led to satisfying jobs nor even given them the critical ability to understand their lives or their social universes.[7]

To avoid this, we must set our educational sights on a complex and humanistic type of literacy. The humanistic type of literacy is logically prior and should be taught as basic literacy; the specialized type, although simpler, is logically subordinate and should be taught as an application. The tests, which inevitably constrain our instructional goals, must be devised with both types of literacy in mind. Both types of literacy must be made "minimal" requirements for graduation, and students should understand the relationship between the two.

In short, we must be extremely careful about what our tests test. It is too easy to say, "functional literacy," "minimal competency," or "reading and writing abilities." It is too easy

to devise a test and title it, "College Reading and Writing Examination."

Literacy is a complex set of abilities which are heterogeneous and of distinct logical types. Those abilities which are easiest to test are often not the ones that matter. Most reading tests, for example, have measured recognition-vocabulary (i.e., the ability to match a given word with its definition or synonym) and literal comprehension (i.e., the ability to answer multiple-choice questions about what a passage did or did not say). These abilities--to understand words and sentences--are elementary. But they are not the abilities which matter at college or in intellectual work. There is significant doubt that they even correlate very significantly with grade point average. Thus we must conclude either that reading abilities are not important at college or that these are not the most significant reading abilities.

In one study, done by a junior college instructor, the reading abilities which turned out to correlate most significantly with grade point average were (a) the ability to pick out the main point of a passage (not just to literally comprehend each word and sentence), (b) the ability to recognize inferences, and (c) the ability to evaluate inferences.[8] In retrospect, these results are not surprising. Students who can grasp the main point of a reading (i.e., pick out what is of general importance) will be able to learn even if they fail to understand a few words of sentences. Similarly, college-level work requires (or should require) the ability to work with

inferences, not just to memorize and regurgitate facts.

The reading abilities which are really basic to intellectual work include the ability to pick out the main point of a passage, the ability to read for significant detail, the ability to recognize and evaluate inferences, the ability to follow sequence, and the ability to relate content to context. The relationship between these abilities and intellectual success is clear. There is no reason, unless we have unequivocal evidence of very significant correlation, to assume that any given student population which has high scores on recognition-vocabulary and literal comprehension will necessarily have these more complex reading abilities--as, at one college, they apparently did not.

The point is about tests. Tests of recognition-vocabulary and literal comprehension do measure reading abilities--and elementary reading abilities at that. A test manual, moreover, may explicitly state that the test measures only, say, recognition-vocabulary (i.e., in testing jargon, that the test is criterion-referenced to recognition-vocabulary). In practice, however, the test will ordinarily become a "reading" test (i.e., domain-referenced to reading). And if the results are made public, it is usually not long before they are used to measure the success of both individual students and whole school systems (i.e., until they are treated as if the tests were norm-referenced).

If such a test is then used for college admission or placement decisions, it is usually not long before high schools,

perhaps under pressure from parents, have to make vocabulary development an important emphasis of their curricula. In New York State, for example, many high school teachers have stressed vocabulary development over written composition because experience has shown that to be a more reliable way to raise English Regents' Examination scores. Thus the very existence of such a test can mean that students get less instruction in the literacy abilities which matter more.

We must, therefore, be very specific and precise about just what our tests measure and how those criteria correlate with our educational goals. Since literacy is a complex and heterogeneous set of abilities, we can no more evaluate it on a 0-100 scale than we can multiply three apples by seven oranges and divide the result by two Mozart sonatas. We must ask qualitative and precise questions about the criteria tests use to measure reading and writing abilities and about the <u>types</u> of literacy to be emphasized.

It matters how tests are created, implemented and used. One early response to the literacy "crisis" was the establishment of the Georgia Basic Skills Examination. At least as it has been described to the Conference on College Composition and Communication,[9] the creation of this junior-level proficiency test makes a very good example of what <u>not</u> to do. The Georgia Board of Regents apparently failed to consult with teachers, students or experts. When expert advice was offered, it rejected that advice. It set up a sub-committee which operated not on the basis of empirical investigation or

theoretical knowledge, but on the basis of its own uninformed prejudices about language. In the end, the sub-committee took an old test of usage, which had been devised for another purpose, and revised it slightly before mandating that no student receive a college degree without passing this test. Thus the Georgia Basic Skills Examination, in effect, established an equation: knowledge of usage equals minimal competency in writing (for college graduation). The equation is problematic on three levels.

In the first place, better than seventy years of educational research demonstrate that knowledge of usage is not the same as ability to produce "correct" sentences in one's own writing.[10] Students learn how to pass "grammar tests" without transfering the grammatical knowledge to their writing processes, just as they learn how to do mathematical computations without developing the ability to solve mathematical problems. So the Board's test fails to measure students ability to produce "correct" sentences.

In the second place, the ability to produce "correct" sentences is just one aspect of writing. What is basic to the writing process is discovering something significant to communicate, getting that something organized and developed, and presenting it coherently so that readers can perceive the pattern of meaning. "Correctness" is one aspect of that coherence. To equate that one aspect with minimal competency is fallacious. So the Board's test fails to measure students writing ability.

In the third place, what the test measures is students'

knowledge of Standard English. Standard English is, in several senses, the most important dialect of English. It is the dialect of those with power, the dialect in which much of society's most important business is conducted, and it is the standard by which people are often judged linguistically in social and vocational contexts. Thus upward mobility in North America is often dependent upon the ability to use Standard English. In Georgia, however, many students (including some white students) speak Black English Vernacular, a dialect which is grammatically distinct from Standard English. For these students, certain aspects of Standard English, such as the s-inflection, are difficult to learn because their dialect has no analogous pattern (as Chinese, for example, does not). Thus these students are much more likely to fail the Board's test. The Board's test directly reinforces the linguistic prejudices of this society and indirectly enforces its racial discrimination. So the Board's test fails because it is prejudiced and racist.

Nonetheless, since the Board has the power to award and withhold degrees, this grossly inadequate test constrained the substance of undergraduate writing courses at Georgia colleges. And, under these circumstances, college teachers would have been irresponsible if they did not teach to the test.

Literacy tests should be evaluated, chosen or devised, and implemented by the faculties charged to teach literacy in consultation with other people concerned. Primary responsibility for a college's writing test, should rest with that college's composition instructors, who should consult with students, other faculty,

and experts of various sorts." In the process of consulting, evaluating and implementing tests, faculty members will necessarily discuss their goals and standards. Out of this dialectic should emerge not just a better test but a better writing program. Some instructors will realize, perhaps for the first time, that their goals and standards (and teaching methods) differ radically from those of their colleagues, those desired by various concerned people, and/or those of the profession. Through the process of discussion instructors will usually teach each other and move closer to consensus. Thus a well-executed testing program can significantly improve instruction as well as evaluating students.

Such a program was set up by Charles Suhor for the New Orleans public schools, which considering the work-load and educational level of high school teachers was a more challenging project than setting up a similar college program. Suhor's program used the modified holistic scoring system devised by Paul Diederich. Essays were written on topics suggested by English teachers. While learning and applying the scoring system, teachers overcame some of the isolation which typifies the profession: the program became "a sustained <u>sub rosa</u> in-service exercise. . . . Average teachers gained a new consciousness of composition . . . . And teachers who had seriously neglected composition instruction were, <u>mirabile dictu</u>, brought into a mainstream of ideas about composition instruction."[12]

The test involved actual writing. Thus it evaluated

student writing instead of measuring some other ability said to correlate with writing ability.[13] The various qualities of "good" writing were stipulated and assigned relative values. Thus both instructors and students could know what the standards were, and instruction could be designed to develop those abilities deemed important. The sort of situation was avoided, moreover, where one grader emphasizes content, another organization, another style and yet another correctness.[14]

The test was, furthermore, integrated into an instructional program. It did not just fail students; it evaluated them and placed them in classes where each would receive appropriate instruction. It was used to assess and improve both students and program, not to exclude students. Although it may have cost more than less effective forms of testing, it was still "cost-effective" when considered in terms of a cost-benefit ratio.[15] By creating a context for effective instruction, it was putatively a rather cheap way to avoid very expensive educational, social and economic problems later. When it comes to testing, penny-wise is often pound-foolish, especially in the humanities.

Similarly, when it comes to evaluating and understanding tests and testing issues, it is putatively necessary to go the long way round in order to come back a short way correctly. To evaluate a means, one must understand the ends to which it is a means. Testing must be considered in terms of instructional programs and educational goals; educational goals can be evaluated only in cultural and socio-economic contexts. Tests, like texts, cannot be fully understood except in their contexts.

Notes

[1]Three-quarters of United States teenagers "intend" to go to college.

[2]One indication is the decline of humanities majors and the increase of certain "professional" majors in this time of lessening job-opportunities.

[3]For more than a century, literacy "crises" have occurred rather frequently--every two or three decades--in North America. Interestingly, they tend to occur when unemployment rates are high and when the job-structure is changing. These correlations suggest that--whatever literacy problems may exist--the "crisis" may be brought on, at least in part, by factors outside the educational system. See Wallace Douglas, "Rhetoric for the Meritocracy," in Richard Ohmann, English in America (New York: Oxford, 1976), pp. 97-132; Albert R. Kitzhaber, "Rhetoric in American Colleges, 1850-1900," diss., University of Washington, 1953, esp., pp. 51-79; Evelyn C. Wright, "School English and Social Order: Nineteenth Century Background to the Work of the Committee of Ten and Its Conference on English," diss., Northwestern University, 1977 (#77-32,370).

[4]Cf., Marie Campbell, "What Price Cost-Cutting?" The Canadian Nurse 74:7 (July-August 1978); J. Berland and D. McGee, "Literacy: the Atrophy of Competence," Working Teacher I: 1 & 2 (Summer & Fall 1977); R. Coe, J. Berland and D. McGee, "The Changing Job-Structure and Back-to-the-Basics," SCETC Newsletter 10:3 (September 1977); Canadian Dimension 14:3 (December 1979) [a special issue on "The Labour Process]; and Harry Braverman, Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century (New York: Monthly Review, 1975).

[5]The present de-professionalizing of the professions is comparable to the earlier destruction of most crafts by the "scientific management" movement, epitomized by F.W. Taylor. Artisans and mechanics were replaced by "skilled," "semi-skilled," and "unskilled" workers--all of whom were less skilled and less knowledgeable than the craftspeople they replaced (hence the need for "scientific management." It is important to remember that many of the artisans and mechanics, to judge by the books they bought in remarkably large numbers and their membership in scientific societies, were more literate than most of today's college graduates. Thomas Paine's Rights of Man, for example, sold 200,000 copies to a population of ten million between 1791 and 1793. In 1817, Corbett's 2d Register was selling between 40,000-60,000 a week (while The Times was selling between 5,000-6000. In 1918, the International Molders Journal editorialized, "The really essential element in craftsmanship is not manual skill & dexterity but something stored up in the mind of the worker. . . . [T]he gathering up of all this scattered craft knowledge, systematizing it and concentrating it in the hands of the employer and then doling it out again only in the form of minute instructions, giving to each worker only the knowledge needed for the performance of a particular relatively minute task . . . , separates skill & knowledge. . . .

When it is completed the worker is no longer a craftsman in any sense, but is an animated tool of the management." Cited by Braverman, op. cit., p. 136.

Braverman himself writes that a nineteenth century apprenticeship "commonly included training in mathematics, including algebra, geometry & trigonometry, in the properties of the materials common to the craft, in the physical sciences & in mechanical drawing. Well-administered apprenticeships provided subscriptions to the trade & technical journals affecting the craft. . . . Such craftsmen were an important part of the scientific public of their time, & as a rule exhibited an interest in science & culture beyond that connected to their work. The flourishing Mechanics Institutes of the mid-19th century, which in Britain numbered some 1,200 and had a membership of over 200,000, were in large measure devoted to satisfying this interest through lectures and libraries. The Royal Institution, which existed in England to further the progress of science & its application of industry, was forced, when it became a fashionable place to visit and wished to preserve its exclusivity, to brick up its back door to keep out the mechanics who stole into the gallery. Pp. 133-134.

[6]Cf., Colleen Marshall, "A System For Teaching College Freshmen To Write a Research Paper," College English 40:1 (September 1978), pp. 87-89. Marshall offers a pedagogy for teaching the research paper while keeping the research report aspect properly subordinated to the critical "opinion" aspect.

[7]There is, of course a contradiction here. Cf., Willease Sanders, "Whosoever Will, Let Him Come," in Erika Lindemann, et. al, eds., Teaching Composing, papers from the University of South Carolina's 1977 N.E.H. Conference for Teachers of Composition, pp. 137-138, reproduced below as an appendix. Over 70% of Benedict College's entering students read and write below the 8th grade level according to standardized test scores. Such students, who enter college with less developed abilities usually need more hours and months of work and study to reach a stipulated level of development than do students who are further along when they enter. If it is not the students' fault that they are less than fully prepared for college work (e.g., if they have been discriminated against in prior schooling), is it fair to demand that they work harder and longer to get their degrees? Is it fair that, when they get their degrees, they may be less well educated? The situation is complex, but I would generally argue that the second unfairness is greater. (The first should probably be compensated financially.) A little knowledge is dangerous; and the inadequacy of partially developed intellectual abilities is often a reason for the rejection of intellectualism. Cf., appendix.

[8]Thomas J. Farrell, "Reading in the Community College," College English 37:1 (September 1975), pp 40-46. Farrell reports, "Reading comprehension and vocabulary scores . . . could be used to predict less than 10% of the GPAs with any accuracy [in Stelle Feuers' study and] . . . accounted for less than 3% of the variance in GPAs" in his own study (p. 41).

[9]Louie Crew, "Testing in the Style of the Georgia Mafia," paper delivered at the CCCC in April 1978. For a more favorable report, cf., Helen H. Naugle, "Impact of the Regents' Examination," a paper presented at the CCCC the preceding year, ERIC: ED 136297.

[10]James L. Kinneavy, "The Relation of the Whole to the Part in Interpretation Theory and in the Composing Process," in Donald McQuade, ed., Linguistics, Stylistics, and the Teaching of Composition (Akron, OH: English Department, University of Akron, 1979), p. 1. See also the references cited therein.

[11]Cf., the CCCC Resolution on Testing, adopted April 1, 1978, reproduced as an appendix below. Cf., also, Stephen Judy's assertion, ". . . in most cases the goals and objectives implied by testing programs were narrow and fragmentary, while the aims of the teachers encompassed much more. 'The problem with the tests,' one teacher said, 'is not that they measure, but that they measure so little. They restrict the curriculum rather than opening it up.'" "Standardized Tests and Their Alternatives," English Journal 67:7 (October 1978), p. 5. "Tests," he reminds us on the next page, "affect not only what we must teach, but how the students value what we teach." Or, as Joan Estes Barickman writes in the same issue, ". . . what is on the final standardized test is 'really' English. . . . We teach one thing, test another, and spend an inordinate amount of time teaching students to take inadequate, irrelevant tests." "Evaluation Procedures: False and True," p. 24.

[12]Mass Testing in Composition: Is it Worth Doing Badly? Report on "A Building-Centered Testing Program in Writing (New Orleans Public Schools, June 1977), p. 11.

[13]Cf., the CCCC Resolution on Testing: "No student shall be given credit for a writing course, placed in a remedial writing course, exempted from a required writing course, or certified for competency without submitting a piece of written discourse."

[14]Cf., Wayne C. Booth, "The Rhetorical Stance," College Composition and Communication 14:3 (October 1963).

[15]" M ost Americans . . . think high taxes are a result not of the public demand for services but mainly of the relentless growth of the bureaucracy. . . . Far from being ready to accept a serious reduction in government services, they think still more should be spent in such major areas as health and education.

"These are among the main findings of a national telephone survey . . . ." Time 112:17 (23 October 1978), p. 32.

APPENDIX

CCCC RESOLUTION ON TESTING
ADOPTED APRIL 1, 1978

WHEREAS public concern over the present state of verbal skills possessed by students graduating from colleges and universities has created a demand for careful examination of those verbal skills; and

WHEREAS in many states and individual institutions, this demand has generated pressure for increased testing of verbal skills; and

WHEREAS testing, especially testing of writing skills, is a complex operation often misunderstood by the public, by legislative bodies, by administrative personnel, and even by composition faculties:

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CONFERENCE ON COLLEGE COMPOSITION AND COMMUNICATION

1. No student shall be given credit for a writing course, placed in a remedial writing course, exempted from a required writing course, or certified for competency without submitting a piece of written discourse.
2. Responsibility for giving credit, exemption, or accreditation shall rest, not with local administrators or state officials, but with the composition faculty in each institution.
3. Tests of writing shall be selected and administered under the primary control and supervision of representatives of the composition faculty in each institution.
4. Before multiple-choice or so-called objective tests are used, the complexities involved in such testing shall be carefully considered. Most important, these tests shall be examined to determine whether they are appropriate to the intended purpose.
5. Before essay tests are used, the complexities of such tests shall be carefully considered. Most importantly, topics shall be designed with great care. Also, readers of the essay tests shall be trained according to principles of statistically reliable holistic and/or analytic reading.
6. The nature and purpose of the test and the various uses of the results shall be clearly explained to all instructors and students in each institution prior to the administration of the test.
7. All possible steps shall be taken to educate the universities and colleges, the public and legislatures, that, though composition faculties have principal responsibility for helping students develop writing skills, maintenance of these skills is a responsibility shared by the entire faculty, administration, and the public.
8. The officers and executive committee of CCCC shall make testing a major concern in the immediate future in order to provide information and assistance to composition instructors affected by a testing situation.

WHOSOEVER WILL, LET HIM COME

During homecoming week, when distinguished alumni of many years past return to the campus of the small private school where I work to reminisce over the "good old days," the conversation inevitably drifts to laments about what they perceive to be Benedict's "going to the dogs," as manifested in students' apparent lack of aspirations toward academic and cultural excellence. Back "then" students were poor just as students are today, and they were largely rural, too, as they are today. The big difference is that for some outsiders present-day students have acquired a new image: instead of being highly motivated, industrious, and respectful, many are viewed as loafing, uncultivated, rude, incompetent boors. The insider, like me, sees something else, however — something that has come as a result of the college's redefinition of its mission and purpose and adoption of a policy of open admissions. Like that of the church that has nurtured it, the motto of the school can be interpreted as, "Whosoever will, let him come, without respect for age, race, sex, family background, economics or academic standing," a stance strongly encouraged by easily accessible federal and state funds for the disadvantaged. Against this backdrop, I will give a composite description of the students I teach.

Anyone interested can note the statistics on the academic standing of entering students, the ones assigned to me.–Over 70%, according to standardized test scores, read and write below the 8th grade level and at least 15% below the 6th grade. Only about 2% place at 12th grade or above. An alarming situation, a casual observer might conclude. But the truth of the matter is that with conscientious and humane guidance, both in the classroom and out, these students make tremendous strides in their freshman year. The problem is not lack of intelligence but lack of exposure: 90% of these students pursued vocational, not college preparatory, courses in high school. Consequently, they were able to get by with easy, often irrelevant courses, especially in English, thinking that they would never have any need to read anything more than simple directions and possibly the comics section of the newspaper and that, having the increasingly convenient telephone and tape recorder/player, they would never need to write more than a casual letter or fill in a few blanks. "Big words" to these students were for showoffs. But, lo and behold, after 12 years of school and "vocational training," most discovered that few jobs were to be had, and those available paid pitifully little. When they came face to face with the bleak reality and began to cast about for alternatives, the open door college loomed before them as the answer to their prayers: tuition grants and BEOG would provide a place to stay and food to eat. All they had to promise in return was to "play school," as they had often done back home. This brings me to the second characteristic.

Many entering students are accustomed to getting by and "getting over the man." Their main objective is to find out what game is being run down so they can "psych" out those in charge. Knowledge about and appreciation for great ideas and accomplishments of civilization are not top priority. What millions take for granted — museums; music other than gospel, rock and soul; theater (not movies); world literature — is entirely foreign to the majority of them. More than half have never been on a plane or a train and would be frightened half to death of the subway. One student of mine had never ridden an elevator until the summer after she graduated from high school. The Pentagon, the Smithsonian Institute, Chase Manhattan are as foreign as Olympus. In short, their world view is limited to small towns and school buses. And their social knowledge is equally limited. Most of what they know they learned in home economics classes or experienced at the 4-H banquet, a high school disco, and possibly the prom. They seem unaware of many of the formalities which mark a person of refinement.

Professionally, entering students are pathetically naive: they tend to believe that the possession of a B.S. or B.A. degree, irrespective of how little they may know or be able to do, is the passport to lucrative positions in the business world. (A large percentage major in business-related fields.) They overlook competition as something they will have to contend with: some still think that racial and sexual tokenism will get them placed where they want to be. This naivete persists even when their own relatives and friends remain unemployed or underemployed after graduation.

For the entering student, the greatest need is to become worldwise, to acquire broader and more nearly accurate perceptions of the way things really are and of what it takes to succeed. Teaching them to write is made especially difficult because so much has to be done in the pre-writing stage to fill the knowledge and experience void which is so characteristic of them. Once the gap — or chasm — is bridged, students such as the ones I have described can and very often do become highly efficient and productive writers.